



# Elijah Challenges the Prophets of Baal

1 Kings 18:16-40

BIBLE BACKGROUND  
FOR LEADERS

## God Sends Elijah to Ahab

During the time Elijah was staying in Zarephath, Ahab, king of Israel, was apparently looking for him. Jezebel, Ahab's wife, had been killing prophets who followed God, and we can assume Ahab and Jezebel wanted to do the same to Elijah. A man named Obadiah was in charge of Ahab's palace. Obadiah was a devout follower of God and had hidden some prophets of God from Jezebel to keep them safe.

God instructed Elijah to present himself to Ahab. The drought had grown so severe that Ahab had sent Obadiah to find grass to keep his horses alive; Ahab likely didn't want to risk a decrease in his military strength. During his search, Obadiah encountered Elijah, and their exchange is interesting. Elijah wanted Obadiah to tell Ahab that he was coming. Obadiah was afraid to make that announcement for fear that Ahab would kill him, especially if Elijah didn't show up. Elijah promised to keep his word, and Obadiah announced the visit to Ahab.

## Elijah Challenges the Prophets of Baal

Elijah's challenge was intended to prove that the God of Israel is the one true God so that the people would turn from Baal and once again worship God. Elijah wanted to ensure that there could be no doubt of the contest's fairness, so he asked that all 850 prophets of Baal and Asherah be present to plead with their god. Before Elijah's demonstration of God's power, the people refused to commit themselves to either God or Baal (1 Kings 18:21).

## The Showdown

After quite some time had passed without a response from Baal, Elijah began taunting the false prophets. Their response was to cut themselves, a common

pagan practice in those days. People believed that injuring themselves would convince their gods that they were sincere.

When it was his turn, Elijah wanted to ensure that the contest couldn't possibly be seen as slanted in God's favor, so he had the altar and sacrifice drenched with water. Baal was thought to be the god of water and fire; Elijah wanted to show that the God of Israel is the one true God. When God responded as Elijah knew he would, the people made the right choice. With the people on his side, Elijah took advantage of the moment and got rid of the false prophets, and Ahab didn't stop him.

## The Jesus Connection

Jesus honors those who follow him. Having a relationship with Jesus always requires sacrifice but always brings peace and assurance.

The culture of Elijah's time led many people away from the one true God and to the false god Baal. How does your culture lead you away from God?

What specific beliefs, hopes, and philosophies bombard you?

Pray that God will lead you to a place of confidence in him, with a passion to serve him through teaching this lesson. You can write your prayer here.

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**Elijah Challenges the Prophets of Baal—1 Kings 18:16-40**

► **Bible Point**—Choose to serve God.

**Key Verse**—“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:2-3).

**DIGGING  
DEEPER**

**Daily Challenges**

Choose one or more of these activities to do this week.

- **Think about the idols you identified. What changes do you need to make to stop serving them? Start living out those changes this week.**
- **Is money your idol? Take a “fast” from spending this week—buy absolutely nothing that you don’t need. Observe how your life is affected by leaving out unnecessary purchases, and think about what changes you could make permanent.**
- **One of the best ways to serve God—and to think less about other “gods”—is to serve others. Think of a way you’ll serve someone else for God this week, and then do it.**

**Talk Topics**

- **Talk about someone you know well who has spent his or her life running from God. What effect has this had on this person’s life? What can you learn about serving God from this person’s life?**
- **Discuss how the message of today’s Bible passage might be received by the world. How might the general public understand serving God? What might happen if no one ever served God?**
- **Talk about messages we hear that compete with the message of today’s Bible passage. What other “gods” do people serve? What can we do to help others understand the importance of serving God?**

**Through the Week**

Use the following passages to explore additional biblical perspectives on serving God.

**Monday—Romans 12:6-8**

- **What are some ways you can serve God this week?**

**Tuesday—John 13:2-5**

- **What’s one way you can serve God by serving others?**

**Wednesday—Luke 14:11**

- **What are ways you can humble yourself before God?**

**Thursday—Matthew 25:31-40**

- **How will God reward you if you serve him?**

**Friday—1 Peter 4:10**

- **How can you use your gifts to serve others?**

**Saturday—Isaiah 41:9-10**

- **Why should you choose to serve God?**

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